

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

18 October 1985

Zaire: Mobutu's Challenges Ahead

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Summary

Over the last three years, President Mobutu, in our view, has demonstrated dynamic leadership--highlighted by his strong backing of an IMF-supported austerity program--that has put him in a stronger political position than at any time since he assumed power in 1965. Nevertheless, Mobutu's leadership skills are likely to be tested over the coming year as he confronts formidable economic problems, rising popular frustration with austerity, and increased Libyan subversion. Although we believe Mobutu probably will agree to another IMF program next year, Zaire's prospects for economic growth over the near term remain dim because of low world prices for its major exports and a growing debt service burden. Consequently, mounting public frustration with IMF-supported austerity will increase the likelihood of small-scale outbreaks of labor and urban unrest. Although Libyan-backed dissidence poses no immediate threat to the regime, continued attacks are likely to

This memorandum was requested by Donald Gregg, Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs, Office of the Vice President. The paper was written by West Branch, Africa Division of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA on

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force Mobutu to expend scarce resources on counterinsurgency operations at the expense of budget guidelines and development plans. Mobutu's autocratic, personalistic style of rule has precluded the development of political institutions that would enhance the prospects for a smooth succession. His sudden death, in our view, would greatly increase the potential for serious unrest and opportunities for Libyan and Soviet inroads. [redacted]

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During the scheduled meeting on 22 October with Vice President Bush, Mobutu is likely to appeal for increased US assistance to enable Zaire to adopt more growth oriented policies over the next year. [redacted]

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[redacted] He may also raise his opposition to US plans to sell cobalt from its strategic stockpile that probably would lead to a loss of export revenues for Zaire. Mobutu is likely to seek additional US military aid to counter increased Libyan subversion in central Africa and to refurbish an important airfield in central Zaire. He may also use the occasion to raise his concern about the growing Soviet role in Angola and rising tensions in South Africa. [redacted]

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Mobutu's Renewed Activism

Following a period of lackluster leadership in the early 1980s, Mobutu has reemerged during the past three years as an active and self-confident leader, in our view. Since 1983 he has actively encouraged economic reform and shown unusual perseverance in implementing difficult IMF-supported austerity measures--a marked departure from the past, when four IMF programs failed between 1976 and 1981. According to the US Embassy, external debt obligations have been met on time and IMF and World Bank mandated reforms, as well as pressure from Mobutu himself, have reduced large-scale diversions of export receipts and public funds into the pockets of the ruling elite. [redacted]

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In our view, Mobutu also has demonstrated his mastery of Zaire's politics by effectively suppressing even incipient challenges to his political control and economic recovery program. He has used his traditional tools of manipulation, cooptation, and coercion to defuse efforts to form a second political party and to stifle discontent among labor and students. According to the US Embassy, his amnesty program, initiated several years ago to allow political exiles to return to Zaire,

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has resulted in a large number of prominent exiles reconciling with the regime. Among these are former Prime Minister Nguza--probably the most prominent dissident before his return last June--and several leaders of the Union for Democratic and Social Progress (UDPS)--Zaire's outlawed second political party. In addition, Nguza claims that a number of rebel military leaders now living in Angola want to return with several hundred followers. [redacted]

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In our judgment, Mobutu has worked hard in the past two years to renew Western support for his regime that eroded in the early 1980's because of his intransigence on economic reform and repression of political opponents. He has succeeded in getting the country's major foreign backers--Belgium, France, Israel, United States, and West Germany--to help improve the capabilities of his 70,000-man military and security services to counter increasing Libyan-backed rebel activity and potential Libyan-sponsored terrorism. In addition, Mobutu's growing concern with his place in history is prompting him to put regional initiatives higher on his foreign policy agenda, in our view. Mobutu is trying to establish himself as a bulwark against Libyan subversion by supporting other moderate central African regimes, such as Chad and Central African Republic, through military training and [redacted] liaison. Mobutu also is trying to expand his regional influence by proposing a new organization solely for black African states, and by seeking to increase Zaire's participation in southern African affairs. [redacted]

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Formidable Economic Problems

In our view, Mobutu's most immediate challenge is to keep the budget in line with IMF performance criteria through March 1986 to enable Zaire to complete successfully this year's IMF standby arrangement. According to the US Embassy, Mobutu believes that successful completion of a second IMF program will improve Kinshasa's negotiating position with the IMF and Western donors to sanction more expansionary policies in 1986. Although Zaire probably will successfully complete the IMF program, we believe it will be difficult for it to meet budget targets this year because of lower than expected custom receipts and export revenues. Moreover, Mobutu is becoming frustrated with the stabilization program because public expectations for recovery are not likely to be met any time soon and foreign creditors remain the principal beneficiaries. Austerity originally envisioned for a period of two years, is now in its third year, and has left a heavy mark on the country's infrastructure, wages, regional economies, public health, and education. Moreover, the US Embassy reports that Mobutu increasingly believes that IMF-mandated reforms are undermining Zairian sovereignty. [redacted]

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In addition to constraints posed by the IMF program, Mobutu's development plans face serious structural obstacles. In particular, debt servicing on Zaire's \$4.4 billion debt is a key obstacle to growth because it absorbs an increasing share of the country's scarce foreign exchange. According to the US Embassy, debt repayments in 1985 will total close to 25 percent of export earnings and over 50 percent of the government's budget, despite a recent Paris Club rescheduling. The effect of debt service on the budget has been compounded in recent years by Kinshasa's moves to hold down spending and deficit financing in order to reduce inflation and stay in compliance with IMF performance targets. According to the US Embassy, debt service, salaries, and nondiscretionary expenditures now represent 80 percent of total government spending, leaving only 20 percent of the budget for public investment and operational expenses. [REDACTED]

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Although increased export earnings are vital to meeting debt service obligations and to funding development plans, world prices for major exports remain low and prospects for recovery are poor. Exports, which account for most of the country's foreign exchange and government revenue, will fall by \$140 million this year primarily because of lower world prices for petroleum, diamonds, and coffee, according to US Embassy estimates. Copper revenues--accounting for 45 percent of the total--are likely to meet projections this year, but prospects for a major increase in the near-term are slim because of continued low world copper prices and constant production. Mobutu's hope that the reforms of the past few years would allow the private sector to become the engine of growth has been undermined by the shortage of foreign exchange, which has forced domestic firms to reduce essential imports thereby slowing business activity, according to the US Embassy. [REDACTED]

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External funding is likely to be limited in the foreseeable future. Although donors responded to Kinshasa's reform efforts with increased aid in 1983 and 1984, we judge their own budget constraints make it unlikely these donors will increase aid levels sufficiently to fuel a recovery. Last year Kinshasa paid out over \$190 million more to medium and long term creditors than it received in new funds. One donor recently noted that even if Zaire's external debt service ratio over the next five years were kept at 20 percent through debt reschedulings, annual new disbursements of at least \$430 million would be needed to keep net transfers at zero. Further we have seen no sign that that commercial banks or private investors are willing to put much money into Zaire over the next several years. Despite an improved climate for foreign businesses--profits and dividends are being remitted for the first time since the mid-1970s--investors remain deterred by the country's weak infrastructure, its past history of corruption and economic mismanagement, and political uncertainty. [REDACTED]

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Mobutu's emphasis on political patronage at the expense of good economic decisionmaking also will work against long-term growth. Although the IMF and World Bank have curbed large-scale siphoning off of government funds by the elite, we believe Mobutu is unwilling--and perhaps unable--to halt the myriad of financial abuses that drain scarce resources from the system, according to the US Embassy. In addition, Mobutu's penchant for control probably will make him tilt toward centralization rather than more market-oriented policies, leading to new inefficient state enterprises or, at least, a refusal to dismantle existing ones. [redacted]

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Contentious Political Issues

Despite Mobutu's strong political position, we believe that he will continue to face demands for greater popular participation in Zaire's closed political system. Mobutu has resisted efforts to open up the system by insisting that the one party system is consistent with the country's level of political development, according to the US Embassy. Mobutu formed the country's only political party, the Popular Movement for the Revolution (MPR) in 1967, and last year was elected to his third seven-year term as its President. He has effectively used the party structure, his patronage system, and the manipulation of ethnic rivalries to consolidate his power; party institutions such as the Central Committee and Legislative Council have little authority. Although most former exiles have quietly assumed government positions, UDPS leaders continue to agitate for a more open political system. Mobutu this month rearrested several UDPS leaders because of their persistent demands for recognition as a second political party, possibly foreshadowing a return by the government to more repressive tactics to quash dissent. Despite Mobutu's willingness to use force and the lack of political organization among the populace, we believe he will be unable to suppress all calls, even among some of the ruling elite, for a more democratic system. [redacted]

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Mobutu's manipulation of ethnic rivalries to assure his political control has resulted in a factionalized ruling elite and ethnic tensions throughout the party, government, and military. Although the President has integrated leaders from most of Zaire's ethnic and regional groupings into the regime, his own tribesmen dominate the hierarchy. Mobutu has also placed mulattoes, who lack a tribal power base and therefore pose no challenge to his rule, in prominent positions further exacerbating ethnic jealousies. We believe that this divisiveness would make it particularly difficult for the ruling elite to agree on a successor in the event of Mobutu's sudden death, and could provoke a period of serious intertribal conflict. [redacted]

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Although Mobutu has deterred popular protest against deteriorating economic conditions, we believe frustrations with IMF backed austerity, particularly among the urban working class, are growing as expectations of

improved wages and health care are not met. Mobutu has used leaders of the government-controlled labor union to keep a tight rein on labor activism, but union rank and file are increasingly unhappy over what they see as declining living standards and passive and corrupt union leadership. [REDACTED]

The US Embassy reports that cutbacks in the education system have provoked strikes at a number of universities in the last year, leading Mobutu to close several campuses and arrest some students and teachers. US Embassy reporting indicates that there also is rising frustration with IMF measures among the ruling elite and private businessmen who, also feeling the pinch of austerity, believe that Zaire is losing control over its own economic decisionmaking. [REDACTED]

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Increasing Libyan-backed Dissidence

Although the dissident movement is ethnically divided, disorganized, and militarily weak, we believe that Libyan support is improving dissident capabilities. Zairian officials suspect that over the past year Tripoli has increased training and material support to Zairian dissidents and has forced closer cooperation among several rebel groups by threatening to withdraw aid. [REDACTED]

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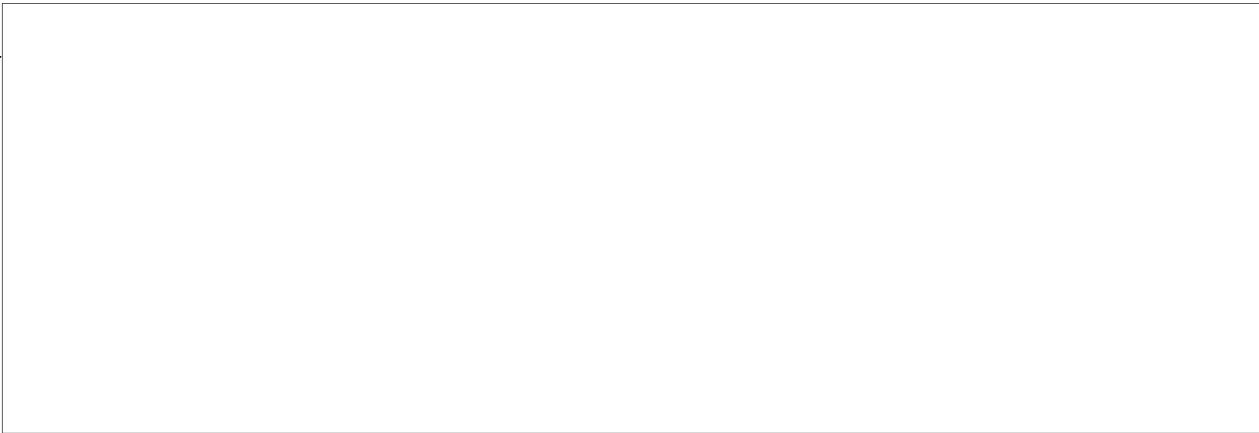
Tripoli's efforts in recent months to expand its influence in neighboring states, probably in hopes of eventually establishing bases from which to launch operations against Zaire, have increased the threat to the country's security, in our view. Tanzania and Congo in particular have turned a blind eye in the past year to Libyan activity aimed at undermining Zaire and other moderate central African regimes. Although there is no evidence to indicate that Burundi is supporting Libyan subversion, Qadhafi's visit last May, a recent delivery of Libyan military equipment, and promises of economic aid indicate that Tripoli is making a concerted effort to increase its leverage with Bujumbura. [REDACTED]

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Zairian officials believe that the Libyan hand is behind the recent increase in rebel activity in eastern Zaire, long a hotbed of government opposition. Tanzanian-based rebels attacked and held the small town of Moba in eastern Shaba Province for two days last November--the first rebel incident since a major invasion from Angola in 1978. Since November 1984, despite reinforced military garrisons in the area and numerous search and destroy missions, the rebels--probably numbering about 100--have continued to ambush government troops, commit acts of banditry among the local population, and sabotage economic targets. They again attacked Moba in late June of this year. [REDACTED]

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Constraints on the Military

The government has been unable so far effectively to curb the dissidence. The rebel attack on Moba and subsequent combat operations over the past year have clearly demonstrated the incompetence of local military units, the shortage of military transport, and the poor logistics, communication, and intelligence support provided to troops in the field. [redacted] Units from Kinshasa and Lubumbashi were needed to retake Moba from a rebel force that we believe numbered fewer than 50, and Army officers were forced to commandeer transport and food supplies from civilian sources to carry out the operation. In addition, [redacted] civilian casualties have been fairly high during combat operations, and government troops have had to steal from the local population in order to supplement their meager salaries--further alienating the population from the central government. [redacted]

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In our judgment, Mobutu's efforts to improve the country's military capabilities are likely to be severely limited by IMF-proposed budget and borrowing constraints, scarce external resources, ethnic rivalries, and political considerations. Plans to expand the armed forces from 70,000 to 100,000 men will have to be scaled back or even abandoned to stay within IMF guidelines on budget deficits. [redacted] Zaire's major military backers have increased their support, but Kinshasa has been unable to take full advantage of French and Israeli offers to train military units because of its inability to buy equipment. Mobutu's recent reshuffling of military commanders designed to inject new blood

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into the armed forces has intensified ethnic rivalries--long a factor in limiting Zaire's military capabilities. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Moreover, Mobutu will continue to ensure that the elite Presidential Special Brigade and other Kinshasa-based units receive a larger share of scarce military resources, which probably will lead to continued corruption and harassment of the civilian population by troops in the outlying regions. [REDACTED]

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The Foreign Policy Arena

Kinshasa's relations with its major Western European backers--Belgium, France, and West Germany--are excellent. Belgium--Zaire's largest and most reliable source of technical, budgetary, and security assistance since independence in 1960--provided about \$100 million in economic and military aid and 120 military advisors last year. According to the US Embassy, France has worked to improve relations in recent years, providing about \$40-45 million last year and 109 military advisors, most of whom were assigned to command and support the 31st parachute brigade--a key Kinshasa-based unit. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Paris has agreed to begin training a second parachute brigade next year. [REDACTED] West Germany, which provided \$15-17 million last year, has agreed to train and partially fund several units of Zaire's new 10,000 man Civil Guard--a national police force modeled after the West German border police. Five West German advisors are now in Kinshasa training the first Civil Guard unit. [REDACTED]

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Kinshasa's relations with Israel are also good. Mobutu's six-day state visit to Tel Aviv last May solidified bilateral relations that were renewed in 1982 when Kinshasa became the first black African state to reestablish formal ties since the Middle East war of 1967. Israel provides important security assistance through its training and material support to the elite Presidential Special Brigade and the Shaba-based Kamanyola Division. [REDACTED] 14 Israeli advisors are now in Zaire and last month Tel Aviv gave Kinshasa an \$8 million grant for military equipment in return for a promise to buy \$10 million worth of Israeli military equipment over the next 10 years. Tel Aviv's financial difficulties limit economic aid to only a few technicians. [REDACTED]

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Although Mobutu maintains cordial relations with most Communist states, he keeps a watchful eye on their activities. According to the US Embassy, Mobutu has not responded to recent Soviet attempts to improve ties, and has refused to reopen the Aeroflot office in Kinshasa that he closed in early 1984 after a bomb that arrived on an Aeroflot flight exploded in the airport. There are about 10 Soviet diplomats in Kinshasa. Some 70 Chinese military personnel are providing maintenance and training

support to the Armed Forces in outlying regions and Beijing provided just under \$1 million in economic aid last year, [REDACTED]

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Relations with Arab nations, with the exception of Morocco and Egypt, remain strained because of Kinshasa's ties to Israel. Arab states have not renewed bilateral aid which was halted in 1982 following Kinshasa's renewal of diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv and are opposed to Mobutu's proposed black African league. In our view, Mobutu is now one of Libyan leader Qadhafi's principal targets in Africa because of his close ties to the US and Israel, and his support for Chadian President Habre. [REDACTED]

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Over the last year, Mobutu's efforts to establish himself as one of black Africa's prominent moderate spokesmen has had limited success. Although his proposal to establish a regional organization for black African states similar to the Arab League has found some resonance among black Africans who are fed up with Arab quarrels that have immobilized the OAU, Embassy reporting indicates that most black African states do not support the idea. Despite Mobutu's desires to play a greater role in southern African affairs, the Frontline states continue to reject his attempts to get more involved. [REDACTED]

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Relations with Angola have cooled in the past several months as Luanda has become convinced, inaccurately in our view, that Kinshasa has significantly increased logistic support to UNITA insurgents. Although both Luanda and Kinshasa are working to keep the channels of communications open, we believe relations are likely to deteriorate further if UNITA increases its activities in northern Angola and Cabinda. Luanda could renew support to Angolan-based Zairian dissidents--at least a thousand of whom probably have military experience--in an effort to pressure Mobutu to end his support for UNITA. [REDACTED]

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US Relations

Zaire's relations with the United States remain strong, as Mobutu considers himself a close friend of the United States and believes that he should be one of Washington's most valued African allies. Mobutu cites his support for the United States in international forums, the 1,800 Zairian troops he sent to Chad in 1982 to back the Habre regime against Libyan aggression, and his continued training of Chadian soldiers in Zaire. Zaire has also supported Israel's rapprochement with black Africa by being the first black African state to reestablish diplomatic ties. Most important, Mobutu believes Zaire is strategically important to the United States and that it is threatened by Marxist regimes along much of its borders. The United States has responded to Mobutu's calls for greater support by increasing economic aid from \$29 million in 1983 to \$56 million this year, and by supporting Zaire's case in the IMF, World Bank,

and Paris Club. In response to Kinshasa's fears of Libyan subversion, Washington has increased military aid from \$4 million in 1983 to \$8 million in 1985, and is considering helping with the renovation of Kamina Air Base in central Shaba region. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, we believe the potential for friction in the relationship has grown over the last year because of rising Zairian frustration with IMF-supported austerity and unmet expectations for even higher levels of Western aid and investment. In our judgment, Mobutu believes that after three years of economic austerity and reform, the United States is obligated to support his efforts with additional aid and more generous debt reschedulings. He is acutely aware that on a per capita basis the US program in Zaire ranks 27th in Africa and that countries such as Sudan, which are less stable and supportive of Washington's policies, receive substantially more aid. Moreover, Mobutu probably is aware that because of the recent rise in Zaire's debt payments to the United States, the net flow of US funds to Kinshasa will be close to zero this year and probably negative in 1986. [REDACTED]

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Prospects

Despite Zaire's economic problems and growing Libyan subversion, we believe that Mobutu is likely to maintain his unchallenged political control over the near term. The President will continue to use his extensive political skills, widespread patronage system, and exploitation of ethnic rivalries to retard the growth of alternative political institutions, limit the power of potential rivals, and keep opponents off balance. The President also will forcefully resist attempts to open up the political system to increased participation, set clear succession procedures, or to implement economic reforms that could undermine his ability to maintain his unquestioned hold on power. [REDACTED]

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Although Mobutu's unchallenged control has allowed him to implement harsh austerity, opposition to the IMF program simmers beneath the surface and we believe another year of austerity, limited wage increases, and little public investment could bring it to the surface in the form of small-scale labor and urban disturbances. Moreover, Mobutu is likely to come under increased pressure from private businessmen to improve the country's foreign exchange position so they can purchase needed imports and from some members of the ruling elite who are concerned with both the continued decline in living standards and the issue of Zairian sovereignty. [REDACTED]

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Although Mobutu probably will push ahead with reform and agree to another IMF program, shortfalls in export revenues and only marginal increases in foreign aid will lead to a continued shortage of foreign exchange that will slow business activity, increase inflationary pressure,

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and delay development plans. In our view, Mobutu will become increasingly frustrated with greater involvement of IMF and World Bank officials in policy decisions, the refusal of Western donors significantly to reduce the debt burden, and prospects for only limited increases in private investment and commercial bank credit. In our view, if urban unrest, Libyan-supported dissident activity, or opposition to austerity from within the ruling elite grows over the next year, Mobutu may feel compelled to abandon the IMF program in 1987, claiming it has only benefitted foreign creditors. []

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Although Libyan-backed rebels are not an immediate threat to the regime, continued raids into eastern Zaire will force Mobutu to expend scarce resources on counterinsurgency operations. In response to Libyan pressure, the rebels probably will continue attacks in eastern Zaire in the coming months, perhaps causing a spectacular incident in an effort to disrupt celebrations marking Mobutu's 20th year in power in late November. In our view, military units in eastern Zaire can now handle isolated attacks without support from Kinshasa-based units. If rebel capabilities improve significantly, however, and they launch simultaneous small-scale attacks along the eastern border or a single large-scale attack with over 500-men, we believe Mobutu would be forced to send Kinshasa-based troops to eastern Zaire. Zaire's lack of military transport probably would force Mobutu to ask for Western logistic assistance if a rapid transfer of troops was needed to protect major towns or vital mining enclaves in the Shaba region. []

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Mobutu's efforts to play a greater regional leadership role probably will meet with only limited success. We believe Kinshasa's moves to counter Libyan subversion in central Africa probably provide Mobutu his best opportunity to expand his influence. Nevertheless, other regional initiatives such as establishing a black African league, mediating an Angolan internal reconciliation, or playing a greater role in southern African affairs are unlikely to bear fruit, primarily because Zaire's close ties to the West and Israel have left Mobutu isolated. In an effort to improve his regional standing, he is likely to resume membership in the OAU, while looking for opportunities to speak out against apartheid, economic exploitation, and other issues that would improve Zaire's nonaligned credentials at little cost to its relations with the West. []

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Mobutu's sudden death would greatly increase the potential for serious unrest and open up new opportunities for Soviet and Libyan inroads. Mobutu's failure to groom a successor or establish workable succession procedures probably would result in a period of intense political infighting among the elite. A protracted leadership struggle, particularly if combined with increased rebel activity or urban unrest, probably would convince the military to step in. Although a new military regime probably would welcome continued close ties to the West to preserve

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essential security, trade, aid and investment links, we believe military intervention raises the possibility that more radical leaders, probably junior officers or enlisted men, could emerge. A more radical regime probably would blame Mobutu for the country's troubles, be more sympathetic to socialist ideals, and more inclined to look to the Soviet Union and its allies or Libya for support. [REDACTED]

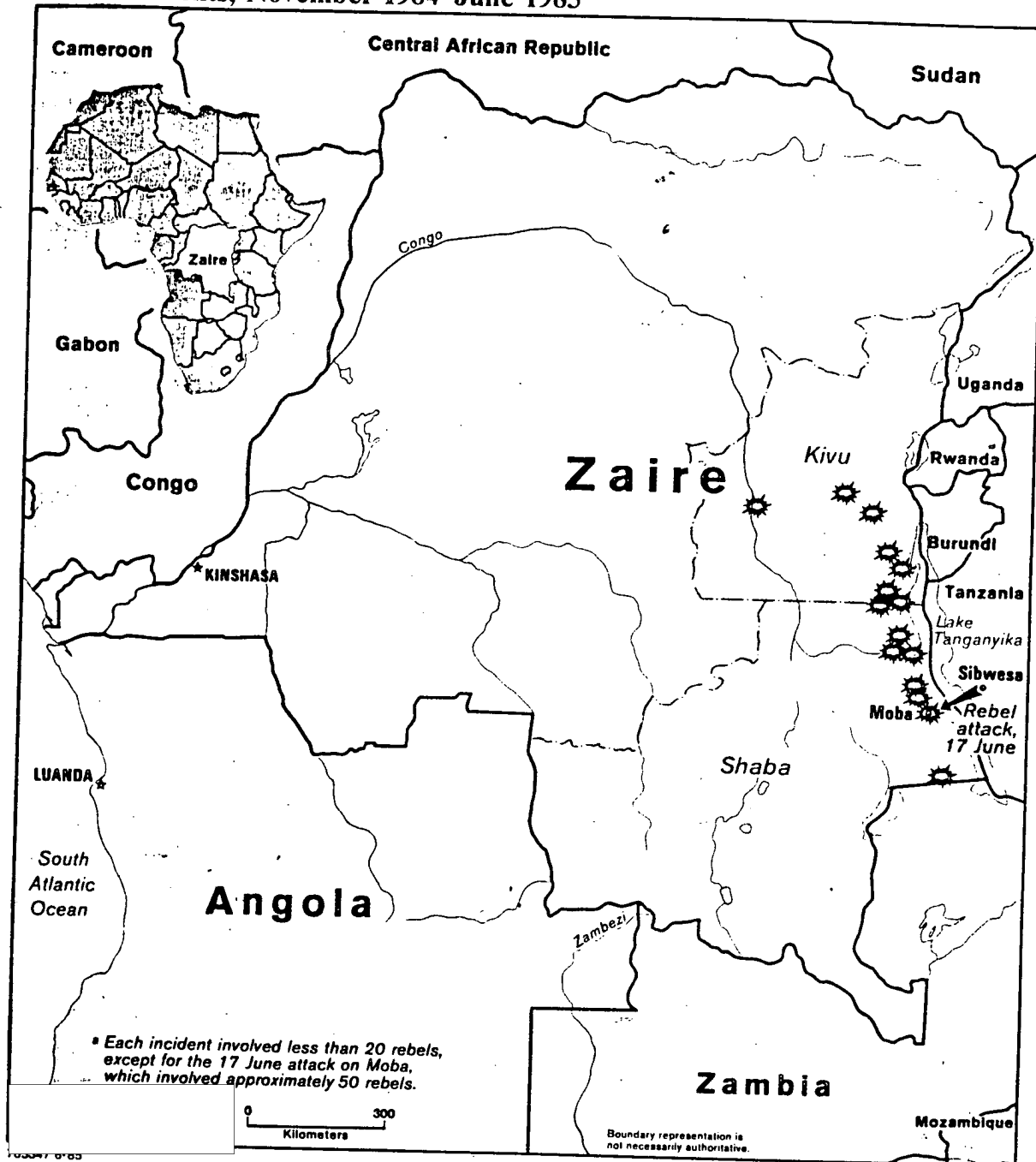
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A resurgence of intertribal warfare--reminiscent of the first few years after Zaire's independence in 1960--is also a possibility under almost any regime in the post-Mobutu period. Various ethnic-regional groups may well look upon Mobutu's departure as an opportunity to settle old scores. At the same time, we believe that there is a greater sense of national identity today and that most Zairians want to avoid the recurrence of the anarchy and bloodshed of the early 1960s. In view of these countervailing factors, the ability of a post-Mobutu regime to minimize violence and instability may depend on the extent to which it is seen by the populace as firm and decisive, representative of the main tribal groupings, and genuinely attempting to address economic problems. Possibly the most important factor in deterring widespread unrest would be the degree to which Western countries--particularly Belgium, France, and the United States--demonstrated economic, political, and military backing for a successor regime. [REDACTED]

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Rebel Incidents, November 1984-June 1985*



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SUBJECT: Zaire: Mobutu's Challenges Ahead

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- 1 -- OCR
- 1 -- DDO/C/AF/ [redacted]
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ALA/AF/W: [redacted] (17 October 1985)

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